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AUTHOR deVoss, Gary G.
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ABSTRACT

Little is known about the social aspects of the student teaching experience. Case studies of one successful and one unsuccessful student teacher present characteristics that may be advantageous or detrimental to the success of the experience. A patron cooperating teacher, congruent beliefs about classroom management, the ability to put all other life needs aside and concentrate on student teaching, and the ability to work long and hard every day in a routine setting can help to make the experience effective and successful. Student teachers should also have a "good placement," involving an institution with congruent beliefs, a sensitive, supportive university supervisor, and a manageable environment. (Author/CJ)

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# The Thrill of Success... and the Agony of Failure--- Student Teaching at Its Best and Worst.

Gary G. deVoss

The Ohio State University

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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## Abstract

Student teaching is generally the capstone experience of a future teacher's educational training, but little is known about the social aspects of the intern experience. In this qualitative inquiry into student teaching, two teacher candidates from a midwestern university were intensively followed as they completed their student teaching coursework. One candidate was successful, while the other was not. The two case studies are presented and compared, and reasons for the divergent experiences are discussed.

# The Thrill of Success... and the Agony of Failure--- Student Teaching at Its Best and Worst.

Surrounded by more myths and assumptions than any other part of teacher training, the student teaching experience is required by every state department of education. But although approximately 140,000 teachers were licensed in the United States in 1977[1], intensive research has yet to answer some of the very questions that would lay the myths and assumptions to rest.

Enumerating just a few of the basic research questions social scientists have about the whole issue of student teaching will show how little is known about this fascinating phenomenon. To begin with, educators are uncertain about the ideal mix of college classwork and actual field experience. The trend seems to point toward more field based experiences and fewer theory classes, but this trend is not based on research evidence. There is considerable argument about both the short and long-term impact of student teaching on teacher competence. As in the medical profession, skills learned during this internship should translate directly into competent teacher behavior in the classroom. Most research findings indicate, however, that one classroom is so different from another that skills learned in a student teaching situation do not transfer to the teacher's first classroom (Copeland, 1980). There are also the related questions of where student teachers should be placed (urban, suburban, or rural schools), with whom they should understudy (the most veteran traditionalist versus the most contemporary innovator, with a like personality versus an unlike personality), and at what level they should apprentice (many student teachers apprentice in first grade but end up teaching seventh grade).

One way to clear up these nagging questions is to carry out basic descriptive research into the student teaching experience itself. This is one study among a few others (Copeland, 1980; Zimpher, deVoss, & Nott, 1980) which document the day to day progress of these educational interns.

The research reported here started as an observational study examining only the classroom behavior of several student teachers. It remained narrow in scope for only a short time, however. As the observations focused in on two classrooms with student teachers assigned, it became clear that not only was the student teacher immersed in the classroom's network of observable behavior-constraining patterns but also was immersed in the wider network of school, university, and home settings. While the study of classroom behavior alone was important, the wider study of the impact of all the settings upon the student teacher was just as important. This investigation turned from a microscopic look at behaviors in a single setting to a broad investigation into the meaning of the student teaching experience to the student teacher.

This paper, then, reports the results of a study of the quality of the student teaching experience. In this paper case histories of two strikingly different student teachers are presented. The emphasis here will be upon presenting ethnographically adequate descriptions of the experience as viewed by the two student teachers; this means accounting for the preentry expectations and characteristics, a description of the experience itself, and the effect of the experience in social, psychological, economic, and life gestalt terms.

## Method

Each student teacher visited the prospective cooperating teacher to introduce herself to the teacher and the students. Soon after this visit,

but before student teaching began, each student teacher was interviewed about her impressions of that visit. Each teacher was also interviewed before the student teaching experience began.

A thorough life history was collected on each student teacher.

When student teaching began, the author attended the student teacher's classroom with the university supervisor once a week during the ten weeks quarter. The author also attended a weekly seminar held by the elementary supervisor during which various topics were discussed. Interviews with the supervisor, the cooperating teachers, and the student teachers were conducted intermittently throughout the quarter. Most of these were informal; however, some were formal and were tape-recorded. The intent of these interviews was to gather information to portray the effect of the student teaching experience on the student teacher's life and to record the changes that occurred as the student teaching experience progressed.

A final exit interview was conducted with each student teacher and her cooperating teacher at the end of the quarter. A lengthy interview was also conducted with the elementary supervisor at the end of the quarter to provide an overview of the supervisor's perception of the student teacher during the quarter.

The interviews, the observations, the interviews with the student teachers, supervisors, cooperating teachers, and the observations of the supervisors and the author were then compiled and used to prepare this article.

Mary: The Best Student-Teaching Experience.

Many midwestern universities and colleges offer teacher training programs that combine an undergraduate education with state certification. This has the effect of producing young potential teachers. Many have never experienced another profession, are single, and have had limited experience

outside the geographic region in which the university is located. Mary is one such graduate. She is from a small town in the southern part of the state. She attended a small high school of 250 students and came directly to the university after graduation. After completing four years of college she is 21 and certified to teach K - 8th grade in the state.

Although Astin (1978) provides evidence that college can have a significant impact on students, most of the indicators Astin uses to measure change would suggest that Mary has been remarkably unchanged by her experience in the college of education. She neither smokes nor drinks, has not changed her political views, has joined no campus organizations, has made few lasting friends at the university, and, except for this writer, has not spoken socially with professors. Mary lived in a dormitory during her four years at the university and often went home on weekends. Her ties to her family and home town were still a major influence on her thinking after four years of college.

One event has changed several of Mary's plans. She became engaged to a senior engineering student at the university. As Mary put it:

> We're looking together and hopefully he'll probably have a better chance at getting a job than I will, but...if I don't get a job (in this school), I'll just sub for a while...If we weren't getting married, I would have liked to gone back, taught in the school I went to...I still know all the kids, that would have been exciting. (But) So I'll be subbing next quarter, and then hoping to get a job.

Following in the footsteps of two of her five sisters, she has spent four predictable years at a very large university, neither causing problems not incurring any. Being money conscious, Mary has worked in her dorm dining hall the entire four years. Even with the burden of working she has made it through college with a diploma, a husband, and possibly a job. Mary's horizons have not expanded as a result of college, but she is aware of this:

> Last quarter was kinda like its been since my junior year (when Mary became formally accepted to the college of education and took only elementary ed classes)...we had a language arts class, I had that plus I was working every night and wouldn't get home until 7:00 at night and I hadn't done anything but go to classes and worked

This background information evokes the image of a complacent, hard-working 21-year old, who anticipates a comfortable and secure future as a wife and part-or full-time teacher. The description of her student teaching experience fulfills the prediction one could make that Mary would expect to be, and indeed be, a successful, reliable, and highly-esteemed student teacher.

Student Teaching, the Week Before

Mary was assigned to a first-grade in a local suburban school. Her supervisor, Helen, is a Ph.D. candidate in education, and supervises 11 other student teachers.

Mary's master teacher, Mrs. Lully, is a 15-year professional, and runs a highly-structured traditional program. Mary visited her prior to starting, and said of that first meeting:

> She's really nice, I'm in first grade, and there is about 23 or 24 students. It's really neat because we have a refrigerator and stove and couches and I really enjoyed her and like her way of disciplining, she didn't yell at the children, she gave them like, "you can either do this and stay with the children and behave but if you start to hit somebody I ask you to go back to your seat," and then she'd ask them, "do you understand what I'm saying?" So they could make their own decisions as to what they wanted to do. And I thought that was really nice. I'm really looking forward to it. I was only there for a couple of hours, but I would say that she works hard. Just what I've seen with her in the classroom the way she works with the students and stuff I think you have to work hard. It seems that she knows each child individually and does what she thinks is best for each child.

The First Week

As Mary had expected, her first week in Mrs. Lully's classroom is spent learning how Mrs. Lully copes with her teaching role. Mary, however, does not describe her first week in terms of socialization. To Mary, the first week means learning the rules, meeting the other staff members, establishing a niche in the classroom and copying the model set forth by Mrs. Lully. All three parties (Mary, Mrs. Lully, the students) are on their best behavior while initial impressions are being made. Mary says of this week:

> This is really important...she's (Mrs. Lully) got so much to teach me...all I can do is let her set the example and then do just what she's doing. (I just want) to be in good standing, to get along well with the children and understand them, and to just have a really good relationship with them so that we can learn from each other, that's what I would like mainly.

Late in the first week Mary takes a group of three students for reading. Mary sits at a table in the rear of the room with the students. Each pupil has a reading work book with colorful pages. Several sentences are started; a general ending is given. Each student takes a turn, on Mary's cue, reading the sentence and guessing at a missing word. The lesson goes like this in part:

> Mary: Let's keep our voices down. Let's look at this page (a colorful page with sentences imbedded in pictures).
>
> One word is left out of each sentence, and printed at the bottom of the page like:
>
> Hal_____Nate sad...
> Nate saw the_____...
> Hal is_____ at Nate...
>
> mad made man
>
> Each student is supposed to copy the correct word in the space. For the first sentence, John copies "man" in the space. Mary, "Let's read that to see if it makes sense."

John, "Hal...man...Nate...sad." (laughs, embarrassed, but also looking for a signal that "man" is correct.)

Mary, (whispering), "Does that make sense?..,"

John does not respond verbally, but madly erases "man", starts to laboriously copy either "mad" or "made" into the space.

Another student says, laughing, "Hal man Nate sad?"

Mary, "Let's keep voices down, made, is correct...nice and neat now (copy in the word).

All three pupils copy in made.

This exacting routine continues with the next sentence.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Lully is at the opposite end of the room with her group. She is much less patient, working through similar work-book sheets at about twice Mary's rate. While Mary is trying to inject meaning into the exercise, Mrs. Lully lets the meaning come from the action itself.

Mary has wasted no time learning Mrs. Lully's unwritten rules: low voices, neat writing, slow, measured student movement about the room, work completed. Mrs. Lully has already remarked about Mary's pleasant personality and capacity for hard work. Mrs. Lully says, during this week: "I had a very good first impression. She was very warm, personality-wise. She is tops on the list of eight other student teachers. She is very industrious and a hard worker. She volunteered right away."

## The Middle Weeks

There are dual, competing elements to a successful student teach experience. By the second week Mary has mastered any ambiguities in the teaching setting, and at the same time has begun to cope with the university requirements. Mary sees the two sets of requirements as distinct but equally necessary. Mary states her formula for successful student teaching:

You have to get to school early. I come at eight. Discipline is so important...I get my planning done early so I know what I'm going to do every minute...being organized.

After two weeks of student teaching, Mary's daily schedule is:

| | |
|---|---|
| 6:00AM | Get up, dress, eat. |
| 7:00AM | Gather materials, get on bus. |
| *7:45AM | Arrive school, begin to set up materials, prepare for day. |
| 8:40AM | Students arrive; conduct opening (roll, lunch count, pledge of allegiance, sharing) |
| 9:00AM | First reading group. |
| 9:45AM | Second reading group. |
| 10:15AM | Recess |
| 10:30AM | Lead seatwork activity. |
| 11:30AM | Walk the students to lunch. |
| *11:45AM | Return to teacher's lounge; eat and socialize with other staff. |
| 12:30PM | Return, observe and help in PM. |
| *2:30PM | Work in the room, interact. |
| 4:00PM | With Mrs. Lully. |
| 4:15PM | Take bus to dorm; change to go to work in food line. |
| 5:00PM | Serve food. |
| 6:00PM | Return to room, call boyfriend or study or prepare for next day. |
| 10:00PM | -- |
| 11:00PM | Bed. |

*The starred times are time when Mary builds her connections to the staff, and cements her relationship with Mrs. Lully.

By the third week, Mary has gained the respect of the principal (She's a real charger, Mrs. Lully can't hold her back..."), the university supervisor Helen ("Right now I'd say Mary is the best student teacher I've got. She's such a hard worker...") and Mrs. Lully, who says about Mary:

> This is not an easy class, you know. I've been teaching for 15 years and it has taken me up until now to get them where they should be in discipline matters. Mary is just outstanding in every way, she is always well prepared, she meets every deadline, there's never any delay of materials. Her (lesson) plans are always complete.
>
> Of course discipline is the most important thing. Mary is just now becoming comfortable with the control during walking trips... she is learning to monitor individuals and the whole class. She's developing confidence, you know, it's those little things like voice tones, those kinds of things, classroom management techniques that help prevent discipline problems...(Mary) is very professional--she always is seeking advice from me, others too...it shows in the extra work too--and she's very receptive to criticism.

Mary has accepted the belief system of the school well before the third week, but has not until now proven to the school staff that she deserves "insider" status. By the third week it is clear that she is not acting, but is totally committed to the structure, the values, and the behavior that are esteemed by the school staff.

Comments Mrs. Lully makes at conferences and in informal conversations support the hunch that Mary is being considered for group membership:

> Week 1:
> "Mr. Payne (the principal) has already noticed Mary's organization."
> "I am pleased that Mary is already asking for extra work."
>
> Week 2:
> "Mary's discipline is very good."
> "I am encouraging Mary to fill out her sub papers so she can sub for me when I'm absent."
>
> Week 4:
> "I'm going to recommend to Mr. Payne that Mary teach here next year if there's an opening."

Mary knows Mrs. Lully supports her 100 percent, and she models much of Mrs. Lully's role behavior. During the fourth week, Mary makes two unsolicited comments:

> A lot of learning goes on here. I can't think of a better way to run my class when I get a job...
>
> (Speaking of quieting the class after transitions) Like Mrs. Lully, what Mrs. Lully does is...like, it's a cue, she stands in front of the class and the kids like get their bodies under control and start listening but when I did that they didn't see me, so I talked to Mrs. Lully about it and it seemed like the noise got louder so I always have to verbalize for the most part. "Stop" usually, you know, and sometimes it usually takes about two times but then if they don't I tell them how I feel, "that really makes me all upset because we're all ready and you're not" but like today, with our lunch, it was kind of hard to get the children back under control because we had cooked lunch in there just from recess and the place was kind of messy because we did a lot of cutting this morning and it was just kind of hard to get the children under control.

Q: Would you like to do that all the time, eat in the room?

No, we (Mary and Mrs. Lully) were talking about that today. She doesn't think that it's a good idea, neither do I.

The Last Weeks

Predictably, Mary's last weeks go smoothly. She continues to meet university requirements for setting up a center, planning a unit, assuming a full teaching load for the last week. At home, Mary's mother is beginning the preparations for the June wedding; Mary's fiance is also busy with classwork. Mary's life totally revolves around the classroom during the last two weeks as she teaches full-time, completes her nutrition unit, and makes plans to substitute upon graduation.

During the last three weeks Helen's (the supervisor) opinion toward Mary changes. During the first half of the quarter, Helen is impressed by Mrs. Lully's glowing recommendations and Mary's timely completion of university requirements. To Helen, though, teaching is a complex, theoretical activity as well as a practical matter. As the weeks pass, Helen makes gentle notations on the observation record about child development and learning issues Helen sees Mary slighting. By week 8, she no longer equates Mary with her conception of an ideal teacher: a creative empathic, proactive facilitator, one who guides children in their quest for learning rather than keeps them on an orderly timetable.

Some of the comments go like this:

> Week 4:
> "Mrs. Lully mentioned today that you are controlling discipline very well. Did you notice the class response to the Walt Disney version (of a fairy tale) compared to the English folk tale Mrs. Lully read first? It is important to expand children's exposure to literature beyond Golden Books."

Week 6;
"There was a great discussion going about painting with your mouth from which you could have drawn a lot of information from the children and develop many ideas. You cut it off, without seeming aware of it, (so you) could start math dittos."

Mary is never aware of Helen's disappointment over Mary's abandonment of creative risk for the safety of order. Helen realizes the environment in Mrs. Lully's room is too powerful for her to dent. The final conference form is filled with positive comments from Helen and Mrs. Lully:

1. List below the strengths of the student teacher:

1) Grown in confidence and in ability to manage the class without the teacher, good classroom control.
2) Is able to carry through on routine matters, interruptions in the schedule--developed flexibility to handle the unexpected.
3) Feels comfortable with discipline, able to cope with children's problems as they arise.
4) Developed a good rapport with the cooperating teacher and the staff.

The student teaching experience was positive for both participants. Growth for the cooperating teacher and the student teacher.

2. List below student teacher behaviors/techniques that need improvement.

Needs help to set up for beginning of the year because of winter quarter experience preparation for substitute teaching.

In contrast, Helen's final unofficial opinion of Mary expresses her dissatisfaction with Mary's progress:

Well, whatever Mrs. Lully's doing, good bad or indifferent, Mary is doing it also. There's no question in my mind that Mary is highly influenced by Mrs. Lully.

Q: More than any other student teacher do you think?

I don't think more, necessarily, but I think she definitely is. First of all I think Mary is a pleaser, she wants to please those people who are above her and I don't mean that as a good or bad quality I just think it influences...she's going to do things to please Mrs. Lully, as most student teachers will,

and secondly I think that Mrs. Lully is a very strong individual and I just think that a lot of things that Mrs. Lully is doing Mary is picking up, whether it's realized or not I think it's there. When Mary...I've watched Mary direct a couple of lessons and I've read literature on student teachers trying to survive, if you get through a lesson you're a successful teacher and I see that in Mary. I see that she has her schedule and if she can move smoothly from math to reading or whatever it is in the half an hour time or whatever they have, that she feels successful, and that's exactly what she's doing. She's cutting off all kinds of conversation and she's cutting off all kinds of idea expansion and all kinds of things the kids are bringing, and I noticed it especially when I was in the last time, she has half an hour from 1 to 1:30 and there were three different lessons in that time and one of them...I can't remember what the discussion was at that time...oh, one of them was the sharing they do and they have different themes for their sharing, this day was news article sharing and she did allow the children, which a lot of people won't do in a show and tell type of thing, a child came up and presented a little news article that he got out of the paper and told about it and then the kids were allowed to question him, which I thought was really neat because a lot of teachers are so worried about getting everybody up there that they say their thing and sit down and there's never any...so at least she did let the kids question each other and ask but then there was something... I don't know...and every child in the classroom chewed into the idea and everyone had an idea about it and everyone had neat ideas to say about it and it related somehow to a lot of stuff they were trying to accomplish in the classroom and other lessons and stuff, and but then it was 1:15 and "I'm sorry" and it was like "now close your...put away your sharing, we're going to math and open to page whatever and here are your ditto sheets" and it was very smooth and there was absolutely no trauma in the kids and I actually don't think she even noticed what she did, see that's the whole thing, I don't even think she was aware of just killing any kind of creativity, to me that's where learning takes place is when kids are interested in something and they're testing ideas against each other and want to go develop it and I think they could have learned a lot more from that discussion than from the ditto sheets that she was passing out to them next. So I wrote that in her observation, I just said "do you realize that you ended your lesson and there was all kinds of discussion" because I don't think she even realized that this was happening, I think that she was so concerned that this guy had finished his sharing and it was 1:15 and time for math and she wasn't even hearing what the kids were saying. And I don't if that's from Mrs. Lully or if that's Mary or if it was because I was there and she thought maybe she better follow the schedule, you know there's a lot of reasons why she could have done it, but it's something that I hate to see. When I see something like that happen I really pounce --
I didn't say anything like "you did a wrong thing" in the notes

> but I said did you notice that there was a lot of discussion about such and so and it didn't really relate to math and you had to cut it off to go on to math and I said perhaps if this happens again you might want to expand. So, we'll see what happens.

Mary's success derives almost entirely from external qualities when those aspects of her personality, the environment, and timing that contributed to her success are reviewed. Through no fault of Mary's, she has been placed with a patron cooperating teacher; she has been placed in a school where the belief system is congruent with her own. She has been placed, in summary, in a safe and supportive environment. Although placements were completely random, Mary and Mrs. Lully share congruent values and interlocking personalities. Mary follows exceedingly well and is sensitive to formal and informal requirements. Mrs. Lully leads well, has well crystallized opionions of how a class should be organized and appreciates the youthful vigor Mary brings to the class.

Language demonstrates the degree of congruity Mary and Mrs. Lully jointly hold: "control," "classroom management techniques," "structure," "hard work," "discipline," "order" occur frequently in each person's conversation. And just as Mary was socialized by public school, so does she socialize:

> They (the students) brought in foods on their day and we had tasting parties which goes along with manners because we're going to go to Casa dePasta next week to finish up our unit so we're trying to teach them good manners. You know, some of the kids...we took them to McDonalds for like three weeks, during lunch we took like three children at a time, just to get to know the kids and stuff and we saw some of the horrible manners and we thought this would be kind of good to integrate the manners so we're working with manners and tasting and they're doing art projects with the unit.

Sue:

The Worst Student Teaching Experience

The case study of Sue provides a marked contrast to Mary's situation.

Sue has a young daughter to care for while completing state requirements for a teaching certificate. She has been from the beginning a free spirit among the 12 student teachers. Although Sue completes her university requirements promptly and meets the expectations of the cooperating teacher, she stands out in the group as a worldly veteran of many unusual encounters. That Sue is not worldly in a geographic sense is not important; she is, unlike Mary, independent and unexcited about perpetuating the reality of public school classrooms.

An interview with Sue before she had started teaching shows her involvement in matters unconnected to student teaching, her nonchalant attitude toward the forthcoming ten week stint, and her interaction with a male student who later becomes her nemesis.

Can you tell me what happened when you went out, you met your cooperating teacher, what was it like?

I went on a day that I probably shouldn't have gone. I called her ahead of time and told her and then I got there and could only stay for an hour because I had a doctor's appointment but they had a Christmas program going on, a sing along which she didn't know before hand, so I was in the classroom for about 5 minutes and she left and did something so I took the kids down and sat with them in the gym and sang and everything, just for an hour, and then I walked back up to the room with them and that was it. I talked to a few of the kids that came up and introduced themselves but it was pretty brief.

What grade level was it?

Third grade.

Is it at Madison?

Yeah.

What did you think about her, what kind of class did she have, could you tell? How does she run her class?

It seemed fairly structured.

What do you mean by "fairly structured?"

The desks were all in line and so on, I don't want to judge what she does, I'll just say fairly structured.

Is that too structured for you?

Maybe, but I'm trying not to think that, because real structured to me goes along with a negative attitude which I don't want to have, so fairly structured, I'll say more later.

What about the kids, did any of them stand out to you, do you remember any of them?

Yeah, one little boy was punching and hitting the other kids in the Christmas Sing Along, so I asked him to come sit back here, so that was fine with him so probably needed attention or something, because as soon as he came and sat by me everything was fine. Another little girl came up and introduced herself, she was really friendly and she was moving which bummed me out because she was really open.

Can you remember what you talked about to the teacher?

I talked to her longer on the phone actually, I had a really nice conversation with her. I said that I had a little girl and she asked me about her and so on, I said that at that point I hadn't found a baby-sitter so we were kind of talking about that, and she went to Mid-State which is where I started out so we had that in common, and then in the classroom I really didn't talk to her that much because we were getting ready to go and stuff.

How are you going to do if you had to prejudge yourself, do you think you're going to be very successful?

Uh huh. I've been, this is my 6th year in school so I've been with kids a lot in a lot of different ways. I was a playground leader and I babysit a lot and I've done a lot of projects with kids and I've been in a classroom besides just my early experience and just through courses, I taught Creative Dramatics at Edwards and my Math and Science Methods I did in a classroom for a quarter, there everyday all day long, so I've been in a classroom a lot.

Is there anything that you particularly want to accomplish during this time?

I don't know, it's almost like, it seems like I've done this before. I'm not worried about relating to the kids or that kind of thing, but I think more for the day to day planning and organizing, I think I need it in that way, but not as far as exposure to the classroom and kids and stuff like that.

You're ready to teach?

Yeah.

What are your plans when you get through with this?

I don't know, I have one or two quarters, well I have like 20 hours left. I'm just going to wait and see how I feel after this, if I want to, I'll for sure go part time and possibly full time, I definitely want to sub and possibly...it's hard because I have a little girl and I like to be with her but for positive I want to sub and possibly teach or maybe ideally a kindergarten or pre-school where I could work half day and be with my little girl the other half.

The First Week

Sue spends her first week observing Miss Smith, her cooperating teacher. Miss Smith is self-assured but neutral rather than gushingly enthusiastic about Sue's potential. In an interview before Sue began student teaching, Miss Smith says:

> She seemed very self assured, assumed responsibility well in watching an atypical situation. She watched the class a day before Christmas vacation.

A more carefully guarded interview could not be imagined.

During the first week of student teaching Sue encounters a variety of personal problems. During one day, for example, her car breaks down as she is trying to take her daughter to a babysitter; she is late for school. Again her car does not start in the afternoon, so Sue comes in late to a weekly student teaching seminar. Finally, she picks up her daughter and discovers that she has a 105 degree temperature. The sitter has not noticed the temperature; so Sue's daughter is near fever convulsions. Sue manages to

race her daughter home and into a bathtub full of lukewarm water. Interestingly, the cooperating teacher and supervisor only recognize that Sue has been late.

These notes are taken during the first week of the quarter.

> Sue has just finished two reading groups. Mrs. Smith takes over the class as they begin a spelling test. Sue goes to the back of the room and sits down on a rug, listens to the spelling test being given.
>
> Miss Smith doesn't shout; she quietly talks in a conversational tone of voice. None of the kids say anything as the test goes on. The class is relaxed.
>
> Miss Smith laughs as she chews a stick of gum and gives the spelling test. She is into testing; this PM they will take math pretest, after just finishing a reading pretest and this spelling test.
>
> Sue's supervisor, Helen, is over by Sue, talking to her. Snatches of conversation float up, "It really shows that you like kids...", "you have a confident manner...", "it looks like you're in control." (This is obviously a pep talk.)
>
> As the test goes on, Sue wanders over, says, "Miss Smith is really neat, I really learn a lot from her...I'm lucky... I'm having a hell of a time keeping up, getting work done, I need five more hours a day."
>
> Later Helen says, "Sue's been sick, her kid's been sick, they have had earaches, fevers, colds. All I ever get from Sue is a bunch of complaints..."

These field notes provide a picture of a typical third-grade classroom in this country, one neither overly permissive nor authoritarian. An interesting phenomenon is occuring here, though. Sue is quite impressed with her master teacher, and considers herself to be making good progress in her assignment. Helen, however, is concerned about the frequency with which Sue has been late to or missed class because of health problems, and translates Sue's conversations about these episodes as "complaints."

In the first weeks Sue appears confident and self-assured, but she is showing signs of strain caused by her daughter's illness, her own earaches,

and the demands of her family. Sue mentions these factors repeatedly in conversations with her student teaching peers and Helen, her supervisor.

Late in the third week Sue first admits that she is having trouble not only with external requirements, university, home, personal problems; but with classroom discipline. Sue does not recognize that her marginal belief in the utility of the experience, her lack of commitment to the value system of Mrs. Smith's class, and her frequent disorganization are contributing to her fatigue, her illness, her impatience with the students, and her inability to cope with minor problems. Sue blames the system and the students:

> I can't stand telling those guys to (the students) to sit down, be quiet all day. I think about treating Linda (her daughter) like that, it makes me laugh. I just can't do it, they should be able to work on their own, but they're too used to being told what to do all the time.
>
> It's Erik, too. If it wasn't for him it would be a perfect class. He's an LD (learning disabled), he can't sit still, he's always got the class going. Miss Smith, you know, she knows exactly how to handle him. She's the only one he'll listen to...
>
> It's such a bore...how can anybody take it, the whole day there, constantly saying, "sit down"? I don't have a minute to get my business (errands) done after I spend the whole day telling them to "be quiet."
>
> There's a good chance I'll be able to start a preschool after this... but I've spent six goddam years working for this and I'm going to stick it out.

On the surface, Sue is making good progress; beneath the surface she is already struggling to keep up, finding ways to rationalize her management problems, and is eager for student teaching to end. One comment from Helen's notes to Sue illustrates this struggle:

> Student Teaching Supervision form
> Week Three
> (Sue has just introduced a letter-writing unit to the whole class)
>
> "You set limits on the activity which were reasonable and you maintained them throughout the lesson. But everyone was talking

(at the same time). It helps to flick the lights or ring a bell or some cue for attention instead of shouting over the noise."

Final Weeks: "A Bad Day"

One term that student teachers universally understand is "the bad day." Depending on the circumstances the bad day is attributed to different factors. During the seventh week Sue has as bad a day as any student teacher has had.

> At two o'clock she is teaching a lesson in social studies; however, Erik, whom Sue noticed the first day, is returning to haunt her on this worst day of all. The social studies lesson has deteriorated into a half plea, half lecture for cooperation. The class is sitting in their seats quietly (but restively) while Sue stands at the front of the class and implores the students to cooperate so that she doesn't 'have to stand in front of the class and tell them to be quiet all day.' At this point there is suddenly a giant commotion in the rear of the class. Without warning, Erik jumps up with tears in his eyes and smashes the boy sitting next to him in the back with his fist and shouts 'just tell him to knock it off, just tell him to knock it off.' Erik then starts angry pacing around the room, upset and out of control, going nowhere but just pacing back and forth and shouting 'I'm not going to take that from him anymore, just tell him to knock it off, I just can't take it.'
>
> A substitute is in the room with Sue. Sue tries to handle it by calmly telling Erik just to sit down. She says, 'Erik, please sit down...Erik, please sit down...' to no avail since Erik continues to pace back and forth half shouting, half crying for the boy next to him to stop whatever behavior caused the outburst. The substitute tries to salvage the situation by shouting at Erik. 'Erik put your name on the board right now'. This is an indication that Erik will be punished later after school. Erik completely ignores the substitute who keeps shouting, 'Erik, put your name on the board'. While Erik keeps shouting 'just tell him to stop it would you, just tell him to stop it'. And Sue stands calmly at the front about to loose control of her own emotions but still calmly saying with no visible impact on Erik, 'Erik please sit down'.
>
> It's a very bad time to be observing the class since it is in such turmoil. As the observer leaves the class Sue is still saying to Erik, 'Erik, please sit down, we'll take care of it

later'. But she has made no move to go to Erik and physically help him back under control.

Immediately after this incident the recess bell rings and Sue comes into the teacher's lounge practically in pieces. The first thing she says is, 'absolutely no interviews today, do you hear, absolutely no interviews. This is the worst day of my life. I absolutely cannot stand in front of that class and tell them to be quiet one more time. I absolutely can't do it. This is absolutely the end. This is the worst day I've had in my whole life.' She continues, 'I don't want to be interviewed today. I don't want to talk to anybody. I just want a cigarette and to get out of here.'

A learning disabilities teacher who is a friend of Sue's in the school comes over, and through a humorous recount of an experience that she had with a child who used to run out of class and cause the learning disabilities teacher to chase the child down the street, calms Sue down enough so that Sue can finish the cigarette and not repeat over and over, 'I will not stand in front of that class anymore and tell them to be quiet, I just will not do it.' After a few minutes Sue was calmed down sufficiently so that she can laugh a bit about the whole incident but she is still quite shaken and obviously has no strong desire to go back to the class for the rest of the afternoon. However, by the time the bell rings she's mustered up her courage to head back again and face them.

Later that afternoon Sue does manage to carry out the remainder of the social studies lesson, in which she talks about the difference between peninsulas and islands.

This incident occurred during the eighth week. Other things occur in Sue's personal life that makes demands on her time. She cannot devote enough time to student teaching to overcome classroom administrative and management problems. She is now completely responsible for the class and struggles to carry out daily lessons. Sue and her husband are in the process of buying a house near the school where she's student teaching because they're planning to stay in this city for a few more years. Sue feels that she can't become a teacher because it affects her home life: "I get home from this bullshit and start treating her (her daughter) like a second grader. She puts her hand in the toilet and I start telling her that's wrong. What's the matter with me? Is this the way I'm going to start treating her

permanently?" Sue's plight illustrates how personal factors can influence the student teaching experience.

The change from the relatively relaxed student life to hectic, highly-structured student teaching invades life outside the school environment. Sue has says that she "has never spent so much time evaluating herself as she has this quarter. Every night when I get into bed I ask myself 'who am I?"

Sue has at this point decided against teaching in the public schools. She's exploring the possibility of starting a day-care center at the plant where her husband works.

As the eighth and ninth week finish, every day becomes an eternity to Sue as she is responsible for the entire day's planning and teaching (as all student teachers are). On Tuesday of the ninth week Helen gets a call from Sue, who tells Helen that Linda, Sue's daughter, is quite ill with the measles and that she can find no one to care for her. Helen discovers during their conversation that Sue has already missed two days of school. Sue claims she has been unable to contact Helen about it. (This turns out to be true. Sue received permission for the absences from Mrs. Smith even though Helen didn't know about it). Sue's daughter's illness has come at an extremely fortuitous time in Sue's life. The "bad day" has been the climax of Sue's student teaching. She has completely abandoned using this experience as a springboard to a teaching job. Her decision may be rooted in pre-student teaching experiences, but now she has decided definitely not to teach and has decided to do the minimum amount necessary to complete the student teaching experience. Sue returns for the last two days of her all-day teaching and suffers through them without major hardship. She has not had a successful experience and has done nothing to prepare herself to teach professionally in

the public schools. Officially, however, the final evaluation form that Sue, Mrs. Smith and Helen complete jointly gives little indication of Sue's stormy ten-week experience. It states:

1. List below the strengths of the student teacher

   1. She's aware of individual needs and provides for them.
   2. She is well planned and gives clear directions.
   3. The students were comfortable with Sue and came to her with questions.
   4. She interacted positively with the staff, staff meetings, parent conferences and phone conferences.
   5. She conferred with resources teachers and tutors.
   6. She developed her ability to provide individual activities for students.

2. List below student teacher behavior and techniques that need improvement

   1. Additional practice in organizing the classroom program as a whole.
   2. Knowing how to monitor children's independent activity.
   3. Establishing priorities.

3. List any of your concerns or comments that do not seem to fit well under questions one and two above

   Sue has done a good job with a class which has some children with special needs. It has been a positive experience and a learning experience but a very difficult adjustment for Sue.

None of Sue's problems and her mental agony are indicated by the sanguine comments on the final evaluation form. Likewise, her recommendations written by Helen and Mrs. Smith are written in similarly positive terms. Sue is now qualified to teach in the public schools.

## Discussion

The ingredients of Mary's successful student teaching experience -- a patron cooperating teacher, congruent beliefs about how a classroom should be run, the ability to put all other life needs aside so that the student teaching experience can be completed without regard to any other activity, and the ability to work long and hard every day in a relatively routine and

boring setting -- did not characterize Sue's experience. By contrast, Sue has almost been predestined to fail. Her family requirements were used as an excuse not to adequately complete the student teaching experience. She did not have a cooperating teacher who supported her on every issue, although the relationship between Sue and Mrs. Smith remained good throughout the experience.

Sue's belief system and values never coincided with the beliefs and values of the school but it is doubtful whether this precipitated Sue's inability to successfully organize, plan, and develop and manage a classroom.

Another student teacher whose experience was more like Mary's had a similar home situation, had a child several weeks prior to beginning student teaching and had many other external requirements. She had, however, the help of a very supportive cooperating teacher, the capacity to work 16 hour days on lesson planning, teaching and preparing for each day's activity as well as engaging in extra opportunities to ingratiate herself with the school staff, while managing to keep her family life intact. This indicates that it was not Sue's family (in reality) that caused her problems but the whole of Sue's value pattern, work habits and the circumstances of her student teaching experience which caused her unsuccessful experience. Examining the differences in these two case studies indicates that several key indicators surfaced which might have predicted the success of the experience. One is a strong commitment to both the system and the value of the experience. Prospective student teachers who are convinced that student teaching <u>is</u> necessary and that the particular setting is representative of their future classroom are more likely to give off an air of dedication and serious intent. Student teachers who question the value of the exercise, who treat it as a drill, cannot help but radiate body cues which say, "It's all a game to me."

Another indicator is the amount of time available to give to the experience. Requirements often dictate an unexpected afternoon story, an unplanned Saturday morning work session; or several evenings spent in parent conferences or school functions. A student teacher whose entire life is feared to accepting any assignment will be more successful than one whose time schedule is constrained by the external social setting. The best example of this arose in this study when Sue, plagued by unpredictable health problems, was characterized as a "complainer" and "excuse-maker" by her supervisor when in fact Sue did meet all the requirements for student teaching. The old saying, "Don't make waves" applies well here.

Finally, a good placement seems so crucial to a successful experience that it seems ludicrous to find most student teacher placed randomly by departments of education. A "good placement" means here a master teacher who is gifted with sensitivity to judge exactly how much support to offer (or more exactly, how much to demand) early in the experience, as well as a manageable, congruent environment for the student teacher.

Random (haphazard) placement may well be the easiest administrative solution for matching prospective student teachers to available slots in schools, but it can wreak havoc on individuals who get off to a slow start. In this study, switching Mary and Sue would probably not have injured Mary significantly, while Sue might have flourished if strong support from a patron had been available very early in her experience.

Notes

[1]U.S. National Center for Education statistics. Digest of Education Statistics, 1979. Washington: GPO, 1979, p. 113.

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